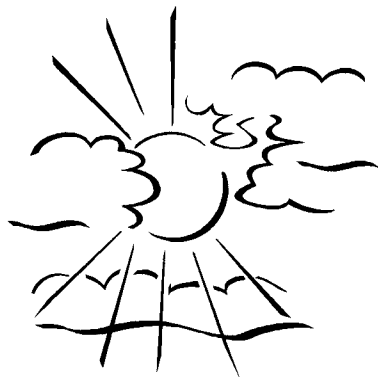


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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, March 2, 2006

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Thursday, March 02, 2006

State probing Ricky Holland's death Panel plans to focus on why 7-year-old wasn't removed from his home after child abuse reports.

Karen Bouffard and Gary Heinlein / The Detroit News

MASON -- Michigan legislators announced Wednesday the formation of a special committee to investigate the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, whose adoptive parents stand accused of his murder.

The committee will be chaired by state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, and is charged with reviewing why the state Department of Human Services did not remove the boy from the Williamston home of Tim Holland, 36, and Lisa Holland, 34, despite numerous reports of child abuse to child protection workers.

"As much as it's allowable by law, we want to view these files," Law said. "Something obviously went awry and we want to figure out what it was."

Law and state Rep. Rick Baxter, R-Concord, requested information on the Holland case Feb. 16 from the state Office of the Children's Ombudsman. Gov. Jennifer Granholm has vowed to investigate whether more could have been done to protect Ricky.

Meanwhile, the Williamston couple told police the 7-year-old son they're accused of killing had behavior-related disorders and was disciplined with a time-out the night before he disappeared last July, according to testimony presented Wednesday.

Investigators laid out details of the statements they collected from Tim and Lisa Holland in the second day of their Ingham County preliminary hearing, which is expected to run through Friday.

The Hollands were accused of reporting the adopted child, Ricky, as a likely runaway, which set off a massive search and investigation before his remains were found in a rural area Jan. 27.

Police were told the boy had run away twice in May. His bed had been pushed under his bedroom window, police said.

Ingham Sheriff's Detective Paul Nieuwma, who coordinated the investigation, said Tim Holland told him the boy "said he hated me," after sitting near a fireplace for seven minutes as discipline for striking his sister the night before his disappearance.

"I told him I loved him and that would never change," Holland told the officer.

You can reach Gary Heinlein at (313) 222-2470 or gheinlein@detnews.com.

The boy who had no chance

Ricky's life: From one family tragedy to another

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

March 2, 2006

LANSING -- In a sense, Casey Jo Caswell lost her son, Ricky, twice.

Once when he was 3, taken by the state because she couldn't care for him.

And again four years later, when she learned that the couple she'd prayed would give Ricky a better life were instead accused of murdering him.

Anger and sadness fill Caswell, the birth mother of Ricky Holland.

By her own admission, "Little Ricky," as Caswell called him, never had a chance. Not from the day of his birth to a 16-year-old mother in 1997, until his death last July.

And as the preliminary exam continues today that will decide whether his adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, will stand trial for murder, court documents and Caswell's own recollections tell a profoundly sad story of Ricky's short and tragic life.

Ricky was born in California on Sept. 8, 1997. His mom had a ninth-grade education. His father, a man more than twice Caswell's age, was a convicted drug trafficker who spent much of Ricky's early years behind bars. The two married shortly after Ricky's birth.

Caswell admits she was unable to properly care for the baby. She couldn't support him financially or provide him with a stable home. But at least, she says, she never abused him.

"There were times when I didn't have money for both of us to eat, so Ricky ate and I didn't," she said. "I loved being his mom.

"When I first found out I was pregnant, I wasn't so sure about being a mom. But my mom helped me deal with it," said Caswell, now 25, who lives in Lansing and is married to longtime friend Matthew Caswell.

"Me and Ricky, we would always have fun together. I loved being a mom with him, and I loved being a mom with the rest of my kids."

By the time she was 23, Caswell had given birth to three other children. Like their older brother, they too were adopted by the Hollands, who lived in Williamston, east of Lansing, at the time of Ricky's disappearance and death. There are allegations that those children also have been abused. Mom, baby became homeless

Caswell grew up in Michigan, but moved to California with her parents and Ricky's father, Ricky Baxter Gann, shortly before her first child came into the world.

When Ricky was a newborn, Caswell's mother helped care for him. But within a few months, her parents moved back to Michigan, and Gann was arrested for drug trafficking and sent to prison.

"After he went to prison, I didn't have nobody out there and I didn't want to live out there by myself," Caswell said.

"I wanted to be back around my mom and my dad and my friends that I knew here in Michigan."

Caswell's grandmother sent her just enough money for her and the baby to take a bus to Michigan, where her life slowly spiraled out of control. For months, she and Ricky lived with a succession of friends and relatives, occasionally staying at a Jackson homeless shelter.

Still, the family photographs that Caswell treasures show there were some happy times: Ricky standing on his mother's lap. Eating his first birthday cake. Smiling, with long curls ringing his head.

"He was bright, happy, fun-loving," Caswell said.

Ricky loved Bob the Builder and Power Rangers.

"He loved helping with household chores and picking up his toys," Caswell said.

"He would carry around his little Winnie the Pooh bottle no matter what, and cried for days after he put it in the bottom of the dishwasher and it melted."

His mother had a number of relationships with men -- always the wrong kind. One of those men, she says, beat her and Ricky. That prompted her to turn to the state Department of Human Services for help. On Halloween in 2000, she agreed to place Ricky in foster care until she could get on her feet.

Ricky goes into foster care

Her social worker, Theresa Bronsberg, told Caswell that in order to get Ricky back, she would have to take parenting classes, attend domestic violence counseling to learn how to avoid being victimized, get a job and find an acceptable home.

According to court documents, she completed the parenting classes, but canceled several appointments for domestic abuse counseling. She said she tried to find a decent job, but said nothing would stick. And while Ricky was in foster care for more than a year, with one family and then the Hollands, she lived in a succession of nine homes.

Baxter Gann, meanwhile, got out of prison and made an attempt to apply for Ricky's custody. But his lengthy criminal history and inability to obtain stable housing sank that effort.

Soon, Caswell became pregnant with Joseph, now 4. That child's dad would father two more of Caswell's children. They never married.

And state workers and the courts grew impatient.

"It's not right to have Ricky in foster care until he's, you know, 6 or 7 years old to see if something's going to happen and you're going to be able to take care of him," Jackson Circuit Court Judge Chad Schmucker said as he severed Caswell's and Gann's parental rights Feb. 4, 2002.

"I don't think there's a reasonable expectation you're going to be able to provide proper care or custody, either one of you, not within a reasonable time considering his age, and I don't think either one of you are equipped right now to take care of him properly."

Caswell said Bronsberg, the state social worker, never counseled her on continuing her education or job training. She says she didn't get any offers of housing assistance.

In arguing to sever Caswell's parental rights, the caseworker said she didn't offer housing assistance because, since Ricky was in foster care, Caswell didn't qualify for such help.

Caswell also says she was not counseled about obtaining birth control, or to stop having babies.

"The only thing she ever said to me was after (her last baby) was born," Caswell said.

"She told me, 'You have to stop having babies because the Hollands don't want any more.' "

Bronsberg did not return phone calls seeking comment; the state declined comment this week on any aspect of Ricky Holland's case.

State takes 3 more kids

Caswell's second child, Joseph, was just a few months old when he was taken by the state.

Caswell traveled to Georgia to have Kathryn, now 3, but she was taken away as soon as Caswell returned to Michigan. And Sam, now 2, was taken right from the hospital at birth.

Caswell is dismayed that the Department of Human Services didn't keep in touch with the Hollands, who had been investigated for child abuse while they lived in Jackson, after they moved to Williamston in April.

"I don't understand why they didn't follow Tim and Lisa to Lansing," she said. "They followed me all the way to Georgia when I had my daughter."

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Published March 2, 2006

Ricky's mom left out information, police say Mother failed to give details of day before boy's disappearance

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

MASON - Lisa Holland failed to give police an account of her activities the day before Ricky Holland was reported missing, an Ingham County sheriff's detective testified Wednesday.

Her handwritten letter provided only details of her activities for June 29 and June 30, Detective Paul Nieuwsma said. The detective had requested statements from both Lisa and her husband covering the several days before Ricky was reported missing.

Tim Holland reported his 7-year-old son missing the morning of July 2. Ricky's badly decomposed remains were found Jan. 27, wrapped in plastic bags.

The second day of Tim and Lisa Holland's preliminary hearing in 55th District Court revealed only a handful of new details. The hearing will determine if there is enough evidence to advance the murder case to trial.

In a typewritten statement read by Nieuwsma in court, Tim Holland said he had to discipline Ricky the night before he was reported missing for hitting one of his younger sisters. He wrote that he placed Ricky in "timeout," ordering him to sit by a fireplace in the Williamston home for several minutes.

"Rick said he hated me. I told him I loved him and that would never change," Tim Holland wrote.

About 1 a.m. that same night, Tim Holland wrote, he received a call from his own cell phone - it was his daughter, then 2 1/2 years old. She had managed to call the last number Tim Holland had dialed. In his statement, Tim Holland wrote he did not check on Ricky until 9 a.m. that morning.

In cross-examination, defense attorneys did not specifically address the written statements.

But after questioning from Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols, Nieuwsma acknowledged he had not found any forensic evidence - blood, DNA or fingerprints - linking Lisa Holland to Ricky's disappearance.

Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency said in court he plans to pursue a theory of mutual aiding and abetting against the Hollands.

He said both Hollands intentionally misled the community and the police about Ricky's disappearance.

They also physically and mentally abused the boy, he said, adding that they failed to "provide any assistance to an injured child."

Also testifying Wednesday was Deputy Andrew Daenzer, the first officer to respond to Tim Holland's 911 call on July 2 that Ricky was missing.

The deputy, who said he arrived at the home at 9:27 a.m., testified Tim Holland showed him to Ricky's room, where his bed was pushed up against an open window.

Daenzer said he had a hard time "keeping (Tim Holland) still to get a good description" of what Ricky was last seen wearing. He further testified that Lisa Holland "was stressed over the situation, I guess."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Tim and Lisa Holland continues at 9 a.m. today in 55th District Court in Mason. Both face murder charges in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Published March 2, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Doctors' remarks land them in court

MASON - Medical officials involved in Ricky Holland's autopsy were ordered to appear before a judge today and explain why they shouldn't be held in contempt for comments they made to the media.

Ingham County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Dean Sienko and Dr. Joyce DeJong, a forensic pathologist Sparrow Hospital, said Tuesday that Ricky Holland's injuries "clearly demonstrate a pattern of abuse."

"Witnesses holding press conferences before we've heard them on the record - that is a concern," District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina said Wednesday.

DeJong is expected to testify Friday in the preliminary hearing for Tim and Lisa Holland, who face murder charges in the death of their son. Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood on Wednesday called Sienko's and DeJong's statements prejudicial. Tim Holland's attorney, Frank Reynolds, said they were "extremely troubling."

On Wednesday evening, Sienko said he didn't believe he had done anything wrong; he also didn't understand why the judge was concerned about his comments.

- From staff writer Kevin Grasha. Staff writer T.M. Shultz contributed to this report.

Mar 2, 1:13 PM EST

School bus workers testify in couple's murder hearing

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer

MASON, Mich. (AP) -- Prosecutors used the testimony of a school bus driver and aide Thursday as part of an effort to show a pattern of physical and mental abuse by Ricky Holland's adoptive parents, who are accused of killing him.

Debra Jones and driver Marcia Polly, who were employees of Jackson Public Schools, said Ricky Holland's mother, Lisa Holland, wanted him harnessed on a special education bus during kindergarten and first grade. But the bus officials stopped the practice because he was well-behaved, despite complaints from Holland.

"We put him in it, drove a couple blocks and took him out," said Jones, the bus attendant, who no longer works for the district.

The bus workers also said they gave Ricky a snack and juice regularly because he was hungry, and they testified that they sometimes had to search for the boy after school because he was off looking for food.

Prosecutors have suggested that the request for a harness and Ricky's hunger was evidence of physical and mental abuse by his parents.

But defense attorneys for Lisa Holland criticized the bus workers for breaking school policy and deciding not to harness Ricky without the Hollands' permission. And they said the bus officials disregarded Ricky's safety because he had been diagnosed with impulse-control problems and other behavioral problems.

The testimony came on the third day of a preliminary examination for Tim and Lisa Holland. They are each charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in Ricky's death. The 7-year-old vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend.

Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in rural Ingham County in late January. The parents deny they are responsible for Ricky's death, and have accused each other of killing him.

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Mar 1, 7:12 PM EST

Testimony continues in murder case against parents

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer

MASON, Mich. (AP) -- An Ingham County prosecutor on Wednesday tried to cast doubt on what two parents told police in the month after the disappearance of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky Holland.

Just two witnesses testified on the second day of a preliminary exam for Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston. Twenty-three other witnesses are expected to testify as the hearing continues this week and next.

The Hollands are each charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of Ricky, who vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend.

Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in rural Ingham County in late January. The parents deny they are responsible for Ricky's death, and have accused each other of killing him.

According to testimony Wednesday by Sheriff's Detective Paul Nieusma, Tim Holland told police he got a 1 a.m. phone call the night Ricky disappeared. He said he was sleeping on July 2 when the phone rang about four hours after he put Ricky to bed.

Holland said the call came from his then 2-year-old daughter, Kathryn, who had woken up in another room, grabbed his cell phone and called their home line, Nieusma testified.

It was unclear how prosecutors plan to use the evidence, but assistant prosecutor Michael Ferency said earlier Wednesday that there was "a concerted effort by the Holland family to conceal details" about Ricky's disappearance.

Tim Holland reported Ricky missing around 9:30 a.m. on July 1, and said Ricky must have left the house by moving a bed to climb through his bedroom window, noting that he had run away twice in May 2005.

Nieusma testified that Tim Holland said he sent Ricky to "timeout" about 7 p.m. the night he disappeared, after Ricky hit a sister when she bumped into him. According to Tim Holland, Ricky said he hated him, but the father told him he loved him and that would never change.

On cross-examination, one of Lisa Holland's defense attorneys, Mike Nichols, got Nieusma to acknowledge he had no physical evidence linking Lisa Holland to Ricky's death.

Also Wednesday, two medical officials who spoke to the media about Ricky's autopsy were ordered into court as early as Thursday to show why they shouldn't be held in contempt of court.

Mason District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina, who is overseeing the Hollands' preliminary exam, said she was concerned about comments made Tuesday by Ingham County Medical Examiner Dean Sienko and Joyce DeJong, a forensic pathologist at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing.

The pair told reporters they couldn't determine the cause of Ricky's death because his body had decomposed too much by the time it was found.

But they added the injuries they found - including fresh breaks in the bones in Ricky's upper body and face at the time of his death - indicated his death was the result of "harmful, volitional actions committed by another or others."

Any potential witnesses who talk about the case outside of court need to be reprimanded, Aquilina said.

"We cannot taint this case," Aquilina said. "I am concerned."

On Tuesday, Sienko had declined to answer many questions from reporters, saying he couldn't say much because the information was expected to be introduced in the case.

The preliminary exam will determine if there is enough evidence to put the Hollands on trial.

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LINCOLN TWP.

Man charged with killing son

By WILLIAM F. AST III
H-PStaff Writer

STEVENSVILLE — A Lincoln Township man has been arrested for investigation of charges that he murdered his 6-month-old son.

Berrien County Prosecutor James Cherry said Eric Jason Broglin, 27, 2247 Welch Drive, was scheduled to be arraigned today on a charge of first-degree murder in the death of Aidan Broglin. The charge means murder while intentionally causing physical injury to a child, Cherry said. The baby died Monday after being taken off life support following a Feb. 10 court hearing, Cherry said.

Lincoln Township Police Chief Dan Sullivan said this is the first murder case in the township since 1990.

Cherry said Aidan, who had trauma to his head, was admitted to Lakeland Hospital in St. Joseph on Jan. 27. He was transferred to Bronson Memorial Hospital in Kalamazoo the next day, he said.

After the hearing Feb. 10 in the Family Division of Berrien County Trial Court, Aidan was taken off life support, Cherry said. The infant died at Bronson at 5:01 p.m. Monday.

Aidan was injured at the house on Welch Drive, Sullivan said. The chief said Eric Broglin is Aidan's biological father, but that he is not married to Aidan's mother.

Sullivan said he could not release any other details of the case.

Cherry said first-degree felony murder carries a maximum penalty of life in prison without the possibility of parole. He said Broglin is also being charged with second degree murder, which has a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Broglin was scheduled to be arraigned at 1:30 p.m. today in Berrien County Trial Court, Cherry said. A judge will consider whether to set bond for Broglin, and a date will be set for a preliminary hearing in the case.

In the 1990 murder case in Lincoln Township, the body of Riaz Khan, a British citizen who lived in Pakistan, was found at North Lake Park in Grand Mere. Police believed Khan was killed elsewhere and his body dumped at the park, but the case was never solved.

March 2, 2006

Day-care provider gets probation

FROM STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY - A daycare provider convicted of child abuse after an infant died at her home must serve probation and perform community service.

Dana Marie Lee, 39, did not receive jail time when she was sentenced Tuesday by 86th District Court Judge John Foresman.

Lee pleaded no contest to fourth-degree child abuse for the death of 8-month-old Isabella Nichole Korth last summer. In addition to 200 hours of community service and two years probation, Lee was also ordered not to work in day care.

Lee told investigators she let the infant sleep on a bed - contrary to state rules for day care operators that call for children younger than 12 months to be placed in a playpen or crib. Korth apparently suffocated when she became trapped between the bed and a wall.

Abandoned Baby Severely Underweight

Police Continue Investigation

POSTED: 6:22 pm EST March 1, 2006

Police have new developments in the 4-day-old baby who was left abandoned in a shoebox. Police have surveillance video of what they believe to be a young woman dropping off a newborn baby girl. The video shows a woman in a light-colored hooded sweatshirt, carrying a shoebox, Local 4 reported.

Inside that box was the infant, left alone in the corner of an entrance to a Detroit building. The weather was below freezing, according to police.

An employee of the building discovered the box with the baby inside, and phoned police. The baby was taken to Children's Hospital.

Doctors say the baby is severely underweight, and she is currently being cared for at Children's Hospital.

Police are still working to determine who left the child, and why.

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Ohio woman says kids requested caged beds

3/2/2006, 11:13 a.m. ET

By CONNIE MABIN

The Associated Press

NORWALK, Ohio (AP) — Some of the special-needs children who slept in cage-like beds fitted with alarms had asked for the structures to be built, their adoptive mother testified at a custody hearing.

Sharen Gravelle testified Wednesday that she and her husband Michael built bunk beds and attached a wooden playhouse the family called a clubhouse for some of the children's toys. The other children then requested and got them.

The couple eventually added wire enclosures and alarms to help corral what the mother described as uncontrollable wandering at night. The couple felt the cage-like, brightly painted enclosures helped keep the children from getting dangerous kitchen utensils and into other trouble, the mother testified Wednesday in a custody hearing.

The couple have pleaded not guilty to several charges, including child endangerment, in a separate criminal case.

Sharen Gravelle was the last witness in the custody hearing, and the judge has set a March 13 deadline for closing arguments. Once those are received the judge was likely to rule within a week, court administrator Christopher Mushett said Thursday.

Prosecutors accuse the couple of locking some of their 11 adopted children in cages to discipline them, and want Huron County to take permanent custody them. The children have been in foster care since the enclosed beds were discovered last fall.

The Gravelles are fighting to regain custody. They deny abusing their adopted children, ages 1 to 15, and say the beds were necessary to protect the youngsters, who suffered from psychological and behavioral problems.

Under questioning by her attorney, Ken Myers, Sharen Gravelle said that when the children became older they acted up more, including escaping from their regular beds in the middle of the night to fetch knives from the kitchen or punch each other.

"They just didn't seem normal to me, I mean the behavior didn't and I didn't know what to do," she said.

The mother said she sought help from county social workers and received none. Research on the Internet led her to Elaine Thompson, an independent licensed social worker who is also charged in the case.

Gravelle said Thompson approved the beds and that at least one inspection for another adoption was done at the home in rural Wakeman about 60 miles west of Cleveland after the enclosures were built.

Prosecutor Jennifer DeLand said the Gravelles have refused a court order to undergo psychological testing. She presented documents from the Gravelles' first adoption home study that she said proved the couple had lied about previous abuse allegations and investigations by a child protective agency in Lorain County, where they used to live.

Sharen Gravelle denied lying and said she had not seen the documents, although she acknowledged her and her husband's signatures were on the papers below a sworn statement that the information was true.

Sharen Gravelle said she met her husband in 1986 at a dinner for a child sex abuse support group. She said she was attending because a relative had been molested. Michael Gravelle was there because he was accused of inappropriate touching, a charge he denies. The couple married two months later.

The Gravelles are charged with child endangering, falsifying adoption applications and lying under oath when becoming qualified for adoption funding. If convicted, they would face one to five years in prison and a maximum \$10,000 fine for each of 16 counts of felony child endangerment.

Family friend charged with having sex with teen

Thursday, March 02, 2006

BAY CITY TIMES STAFF

LAKE - Police allege a 45-year-old family friend of a Clare County couple had been having sex "for some time" with the couple's 13-year-old daughter.

Prosecutors on Monday charged Jeffrey J. Anderson of Mount Pleasant with three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct in Clare County District Court.

The girl's parents, who live near the town of Lake in southwest Clare County's Garfield Township, told police they pulled over a car driven by Anderson on Saturday, and that their daughter was a passenger in the vehicle.

It was one day after the parents had called police to report their daughter had run away from home.

Police responded to the spot where the parents stopped the vehicle and arrested Anderson.

Officers said Clare County Sheriff's Department Deputy Kelli Passino then interviewed the 13-year-old, who said she had been sexually active with Anderson in both Clare and Gratiot counties.

Anderson remained in the Clare County Jail on Wednesday morning in lieu of posting a \$75,000 cash bond. He awaits a March 13 hearing on the evidence.

Prosecutors call Anderson a habitual offender, already convicted of a felony. If a judge determines that to be true, Anderson faces up to 22 1/2 years in prison if convicted of any of the three sex crimes.

Catherine's Care Center gets grant

Thursday, March 02, 2006

By Morgan Jarema
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Low-income women with concerns about breast cancer have a place to go for help this year.

Catherine's Care Center received a \$21,500, one-year grant from the Avon Foundation Breast Care Fund to increase breast cancer awareness.

"This is huge for us," said Karen Kaashoek, program coordinator at Catherine's, a neighborhood preventative care facility at 205 Carrier St. NE. "This was a program we had done previously, but we lost some of our funding last year."

Catherine's breast health program, "Count Me In," is aimed at educating up to 200 area women and referring them to low-cost or free mammograms and breast exams.

The program will identify eligible women, increase their awareness of the importance of screening and help them make appointments for follow-up and treatment.

According to the Avon Foundation, breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in U.S. women and the leading cause of death in women 40 to 60 years old. Based on 2005 data from the American Cancer Society, it is anticipated that nearly 7,000 new cases of breast cancer will be detected in Michigan this year, and about 1,500 people will die from the disease.

The Avon Foundation has funded more than 1,000 community-based breast health programs across the United States over the past 12 years. Catherine's program was selected as one of 117 new grant recipients nationwide for this year. Recipients were chosen based on their ability to reach women -- particularly minority, low-income and older women.

Besides Catherine's, Cherry Street Health Services also was awarded a grant this year.

Catherine's is accepting appointments for the program from uninsured women ages 40 to 64 who meet income qualifications. Men who have suspicious breast growths also will be evaluated.

Low-income residents need dental care

Port Huron Times Herald

March 2, 2006

Affordable options are essential

There are many drawbacks to being without money. A significant one is not being able to afford dental care.

Like other health matters, teeth should receive periodic care. When that doesn't occur, the potential for gum disease and tooth aches increase.

About 18,000 to 19,000 of the county's 171,000 residents don't have health insurance, according to St. Clair County Health Department Director Jon Parsons. Lonnie Stevens, executive director of the United Way of St. Clair County, said more than 400 residents who can't afford to see a dentist end up at hospital emergency rooms with dental-related pain.

Children can fare a bit better than adults. The county health department's dental clinic treats children on Medicaid, and department representatives also visit schools for preventive care.

Low-income adults, even those on Medicaid, find dentistry hard to come by. Most dental offices don't accept Medicaid.

The St. Clair County Health Department, United Way of St. Clair County and Downriver Community Services are working together to help county adults who cannot afford regular trips to the dentist.

Stevens is trying to establish a group of dentists who will donate some time and services. When Algonac's Downriver Community Services opens its New Haven medical facility in April, it will provide space for a six-chair dental treatment area. But the organization needs about \$380,000 for staff or equipment. Chief executive Gordon Weatherhead said it's waiting to see whether the state will allow them to apply for a grant.

These efforts are commendable. They deserve our community's support.

There is one more option. Baker College Dental Hygiene Clinic on Lapeer Road in Port Huron Township offers a \$25 cleaning. Hygienists who have met necessary class prerequisites are trained to clean teeth under a dentist's or experienced hygienist's supervision.

Regular maintenance is essential for healthy teeth, and there should be more options for low-income patients. Baker College should be put to good use.

Originally published March 2, 2006

Oceana Medical Examiner face charges in coverup involving death

8 charged

Attorney general charges eight people in Medicaid patient's death

LANISING, Mich. (AP) — Eight former employees of a Big Rapids nursing home — including Rudy Casimer Ochs of Hart, the current Oceana County Medical Examiner — have been charged with 18 felony counts related to the death of a 50-year-old woman who died because her oxygen tank wasn't changed, Attorney General Mike Cox said Monday.

Sarah Comer, of Big Rapids, died Jan. 16, 2005, at Metron Nursing Facility a day after being transferred there from Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus in Grand Rapids.

Cox said in a news release that he has filed charges in district court in Mecosta County against five registered nurses, the nursing home's medical director, the former administrator and a certified nursing assistant.

Ochs was the medical director of Metron of Big Rapids and Mecosta County's deputy medical director at the time of Comer's death, according to Cox. Cox said Ochs did not disclose to investigators that the oxygen tank ran out of oxygen, nor did he order an autopsy of Comer.

"No autopsy was performed and the death certificate was instead sent to the resident's former physician for signature with the cause of death incorrectly listed as myocardial infarction due to natural causes," Cox said.

He is expected to be arraigned Friday on charges of accessory after the fact to a felony and willful neglect of duty as a public officer, a release from Cox's office stated.

Conviction of the charge of accessory after the fact to a felony carries a penalty of up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. Willful neglect of duty is punishable by up to one year in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000.

In a statement Monday, Metron said the company has fired two of the nurses and that the other six no longer work for the company. The company runs nine nursing homes in Michigan.

"The health, safety and security of our residents is of the utmost

importance to our management and staff. We will continue to provide quality restorative and long-term health care to our residents, while respecting their dignity and privacy at all times," the company said. Ochs' office in Hart, where he has a medical practice, had no comment on the incident this morning.

Oceana County Administrator Paul Inglis was on vacation and could not be reached for comment.

Nate Bailey, spokesperson for the Attorney General's office, said the office could not comment further on Ochs' involvement in the incident, but said more information would be released following the arraignment of the individuals Friday in Big Rapids.

The charges filed against the eight workers include involuntary manslaughter, accessory after the fact as a result of a cover-up, falsification of medical records, tampering with evidence and five misdemeanor charges, including failure to report the incident to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Cox said Comer was transferred for rehabilitation to the nursing facility. She had been weaned from a ventilator to oxygen just 48 hours before the transfer and was "extremely oxygen-dependent," he said.

The attorney general said that, instead of being put in a room where the staff was experienced in caring for sicker patients and where oxygen usage records were kept, Comer was put in a room where no such records were kept.

The staff was not given special instructions to monitor Comer's oxygen levels or track from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. how much oxygen was left in the oxygen tank. Cox said that, because the tank was never changed, it ran out of oxygen before 6:45 a.m. The facility's records show Comer was found dead at 8:50 a.m.

"Early morning reports to nursing staff that the resident was experiencing dizziness were ignored," Cox said in the statement. "This tragic death simply shouldn't have occurred."

Medical examiner investigators looked into the incident but were not informed the tank had run out of oxygen, Cox said. They thought Comer had suffered a heart attack.

He also said that administrators for Metron of Big Rapids, assisted by staff, falsified medical records to cover up the death and left out any reference to the oxygen tank running out when they made a written report to the state Department of Community Health.

One of the charges also relates to the facility's failure to report that Dorothy Pearl Johnson, of McBain, a 64-year-old oxygen-dependant resident at the nursing facility, died the same day as Comer at 9 a.m. The cause of death was listed as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The nurses fired by Metron are Kathleen Rose Johnson, 57, a dayshift supervisor from Big Rapids charged with involuntary manslaughter and tampering with evidence, among other charges, and director of nursing Christine Marie Mondrella, 42, of Paris, who was on maternity leave when Comer died but was called back to work after the death. She's charged with failure to report abuse of a patient.

Others charged are:

—Cheryl Lynn Williams, 41, the midnight-shift charge-nurse supervisor, who also is charged with involuntary manslaughter, among other charges. She's currently living in Palmetto, Fla.

—Tracey Marie Moore, 31, of Luther, who was a direct caregiver and is charged with involuntary manslaughter, among other charges.

—Sharon Elaine Mumah, 39, of Morley, who was the corporate nurse consultant for Metron and interim director of nursing. Among other charges, she's accused of failing to report patient abuse.

—Laura Lynn Ferrara, 41, of Kalamazoo, who was the corporate clinical director for Metron based in Grand Rapids and is accused of helping withhold information from state health officials.

—Robert Earl Koch Jr., 49, who was the nursing home administrator. Now living in Columbia, S.C., Koch intentionally concealed that the tank ran out of oxygen and failed to inform the state about the circumstances of Comer's death or that Johnson had died on the same day, according to Cox.

Metron also runs nursing homes in Allegan, Belding, Bloomingdale, Cedar Springs, Forest Hills, Greenville, Kalamazoo and Lamont.

Metron of Big Rapids said it has cooperated fully with the attorney general's office in the investigation and will continue to do so.

On the Net:

Michigan Attorney General's office: www.michigan.gov/ag

Metron Integrated Health Systems: www.metronhealth.com/

Daily News Staff Writer Joe Boomgaard contributed to this report.

Grand Rapids Press

March 2, 2006

Health-care worker accused of stealing from 84-year-old

Sheriff's officials arrested a home health care worker Wednesday after they allegedly caught her with a \$100 bill that was planted in the residence of an 84-year-old Chippewa Township man. The victim, who claims he lost about \$5,000 from a lockbox in his house over a span of months, contacted the Mecosta County Commission on Aging, who alerted police of the suspected thefts. The bill was put in the box and the worker was stopped by investigators after leaving the man's house Wednesday. They allegedly found the \$100 in her possession. The unidentified woman was jailed pending arraignment for felony embezzlement, police said.

HOUSE PANEL EXPLORING HEAT ASSISTANCE FUND

More Michigan residents would be eligible for home heating tax credits, and funds for the credits would come from oil and gas sales under a package of bills before the House Energy and Technology Committee.

The bills ([HB 5686](#), [HB 5687](#), [HB 5688](#)) would create the Home Heating Credit Fund to replace federal Low-Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program funds where needed.

The package would distribute the first \$60 million in oil and gas severance taxes as they currently are. The next \$6 million would go into the new fund. Any revenue beyond that would go to the general fund.

Though he did not take a position on the package, Scott Schrager with the Department of Treasury warned that the \$6 million for the new fund could not be guaranteed and would not be enough to pay for the credits the committee is proposing.

“Over the long haul, the severance tax is very volatile,” he said.

And he said increasing the threshold for the credit to 120 percent of poverty would cost the state \$30 million. Some members have discussed increasing the threshold to 130 percent of poverty and also creating a 100 percent tax credit for the cost of home weatherization projects.

“The policy choice you face is do you expand eligibility for the credit and at the same time reduce the credit to current recipients?” he said.

The hit could potentially be larger to the state because President George W. Bush’s proposed budget calls for a 30 percent reduction in the LIHEAP budget, Mr. Schrager said.

The package also includes [HR 182](#) calling on the president and Congress to increase LIHEAP funding.

Commodities program is cut Food boxes for senior citizens and low-income families out of budget

By ERICA KOLASKI
Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - The commodity supplemental food program has been cut from the proposed federal budget, a move that could leave a number of local residents with empty cupboards.

Patti Spinella, family nutrition educator with the Michigan State University Extension Office, said that the program was not included in President George W. Bush's 2006-2007 proposed federal budget.

She said that the program supplies about 640 boxes each month to low-income residents, mothers and senior citizens in an 11-county area.

The boxes contain basic food staples, such as cheese, canned meat, cereal, rice, pasta, canned veggies, rotates, canned juice, oatmeal, peanut butter, beans, dried beans, evaporated milk, tuna fish, potatoes, apricots peaches, pears and raisins, said Spinella.

"They give you things that you can make a meal with," she said, estimating that each box contains \$30 to \$40 worth of food," Spinella said. "The government wants the recipients of the commodity program to sign up for food stamps. They may get \$10 a month in food stamps. It just doesn't compare."

Spinella said that she is urging anyone who is a participant in the program, or who has a loved one or friend who benefits from commodity foods, to call 202-456-1111 and register their complaint. Comments are also taken via e-mail at comments@whitehouse.gov.

The commodity program is designed to aid low-income individuals known to be vulnerable to malnutrition during critical periods of growth and development. The program is meant to help prevent the occurrence of health problems and improve the health status of those individuals.

Eligibility requirements for the program, in addition to the low-income status, include senior citizens 60 years and older; pregnant, postpartum or breast-feeding mothers; and infants and children under 6 years of age.

The Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency services Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Cheboygan, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego and Presque Isle counties.

Stoakes gives up rights to adopted children

By BRANDON LACIC
Sentinel-Standard editor

IONIA - In what defense attorney Patrick Duff described as an emotionally-charged day in Ionia County Probate Court, William Stoakes, of Ionia, relinquished his parental rights to his five adopted children.

Following a two-day parental rights termination hearing that concluded Wednesday, Probate Judge Robert Sykes Jr. accepted Stoakes' relinquishment of his two adopted teen daughters and three younger adopted sons but held intact Stoakes' rights to his two biological sons, ages 17 and 14.

The Ionia County Prosecutor's Office and Department of Human Services (DHS) requested parental rights be terminated on the adopted children as well as the biological children. The law allows for the DHS to seek termination on all children at this point because of allegations of sexual penetration involving one of the adopted daughters.

Sykes determined that there was "clear and convincing" evidence - a lesser burden of proof than what is required for conviction in a criminal trial - that the 14-year-old adopted daughter had been raped by Stoakes and that the 17-year-old adopted daughter had been sexually fondled.

However, Sykes went against the DHS's request and maintained Stoakes' parental rights to his two biological sons because he believed it is not in their best interest to sever those rights at this time. Sykes heard testimony at the hearing that Stoakes and his sons had a strong bond and that the boys were suffering emotionally because of the allegations against their father and his subsequent incarceration.

The relinquishment of rights on the five adopted children means Stoakes may no longer have contact with them. Although he maintains the parental rights to his two sons, he is prohibited by an open-ended court order from having contact with them as well. He may be allowed future contact with his biological sons upon a mental evaluation and counseling or a court order reversing it.

Last week Stoakes was found by a jury to be not guilty of criminal sexual conduct in the 1st- and 2nd-degree in 8th Circuit Court in the first of three criminal trials he's facing.

If Stoakes is convicted in either of the two impending criminal sexual conduct trials, the DHS can once again seek termination of his rights to his two biological sons.

Following the termination hearing Wednesday Duff said that Stoakes was "brave" for relinquishing his rights to the children.

"These are very, very tough proceedings," he said. "Bill did not want to relinquish the five, but he thought that would be in their best interest."

Duff said he was satisfied with the judge's decision to maintain Stoakes' rights to his biological sons.

"The judge made a very difficult but appropriate decision," Duff said.

Ionia County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Jessica Wierckz, who is handling the Stoakes prosecution, said she was satisfied that the two adopted daughters were vindicated in court by the judge's belief in their abuse allegations, but believes the court should have terminated Stoakes' rights to all seven children.

Wierckz said she "has a feeling he'll do it again," and although there is no evidence Stoakes had inappropriate relationships with his biological sons, "I don't want to take that chance" she said.

The focus will now return to the criminal proceedings. Stoakes is scheduled to face a jury in mid-April for the alleged rape of the 14-year-old adopted daughter. Following that case he is set to face another for the molestation of the 17-year-old adopted daughter.

In another development, Stoakes wife, Angela Stoakes - who had at one time come under the prosecution's spotlight for appearing supportive of her husband initially - has filed for divorce from William Stoakes. Angela Stoakes also testified for the prosecution in the first of the three criminal trials held last week.

Angela Stoakes was portrayed favorably in the first criminal trial last week, with witnesses testifying that she enjoys caring for her adopted and foster children and had good relationships with them.

"I think she's off the fence," Wierckz said.

Sykes recommended at the termination hearing that the DHS return all the children to the custody of Angela Stoakes, with the provision that the maternal grand parents remain in residence at the Stoakes home.

Neither Sykes' findings in the termination hearing nor the "not guilty" verdict rendered in the first criminal trial can be mentioned in the upcoming criminal trials.

Bad option to adoption

Thursday, March 02, 2006

Editor, The Saginaw News:

A Feb. 26 article in The News about adoption and how an unfortunate stigma is often attached to adoption quoted Ann Ousley, a community development associate with Planned Parenthood.

Ousley spoke about how Planned Parenthood wants women to "know all their options."

Sadly, women who enter Planned Parenthood rarely choose adoption as option. They are much more likely to end up having an abortion. According to Planned Parenthood's latest annual report, Planned Parenthood's 850 affiliates only provided 1,774 adoption referrals in 2003. In stark contrast, Planned Parenthood affiliates provided 244,628 abortions in 2003, making them America's No. 1 abortion provider.

That means for every one woman who Planned Parenthood referred to an adoption agency, there were 138 other women who had an abortion at Planned Parenthood.

I wish that adoption was something which occurred more often and wasn't considered a "dirty word." Unfortunately, when a woman enters Planned Parenthood, she is exponentially more likely to leave with an empty womb or a referral to an abortion clinic than with a referral to an adoption agency.

Since 1997, the number of women Planned Parenthood has annually referred out for adoption has dropped dramatically from 9,381 to 1,774 (a drop of 81 percent) while the number of abortions performed annually at Planned Parenthood has risen from 165,174 to 244,628 (an increase of 48 percent).

It seems Planned Parenthood is more interested in the profit of abortion than really helping women and children with the loving option of adoption. Perhaps adoption is a dirty word only to Planned Parenthood.

Pamela Sherstad
director,
Public Information
Right to Life of Michigan
Grand Rapids